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DISCOURSAL USES OF LAUGHTER IN AMERICAN ENGLISH AND THAI

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While research has suggested that laughter in English serves not only as an indicator of humor but also as a tool to signal turn-taking, establish intimacy, mitigate meanings, and change topics, no research up to this point has compared the discorsal uses of laughter in English to that of other languages. This presentation will compare laughter in American English to laughter in Thai. Speech samples used as data in this study come from popular TV shows in American English and Central Thai that were created in the past ten years. Three American English TV shows and three Thai TV shows were selected based on (1) their inclusion in romantic comedy, drama, and comedy genres as categorized by Netflix, (2) their similarities in plot, and (3) their number of characters. All instances of laughter were recorded from 100 minutes of each TV show, for a total of 600 minutes of data collected. Instances were then categorized by purpose of laughter (including affiliation, disaffiliation, and humor, along with subcategories of disbelief, support, expressive speech act, and pride). The number of instances of laughter across languages and genres as well as the purposes of laughter across languages are compared. Preliminary data suggests that American English uses laughter as a discorsal tool more often in humorous situations than in Thai, while Thai uses laughter as a tool to indicate affiliation more often. These findings reveal that the roles of laughter vary across English and Thai and are thus relevant for second language teachers who strive to foster proficient, culturally and pragmatically conscious language learners.